

United States Postal Service

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(c) If no answer is filed within 20 days following the receipt of the notice, the proposed disciplinary action set forth in the notice shall become the final agency decision without further notice to the respondent.

§ 956.5 Answer.

Within 20 days from receipt of the notice of proposed disciplinary action, the respondent may file an answer setting forth simple, concise, and direct statements admitting, denying or explaining each of the allegations set forth in the notice.

§ 956.6 Hearing election.

Either party may, within, 10 days following the filing of the respondent's answer, request a hearing. If a timely request is not made, the case shall be submitted on the record without a hearing. Submission of the case without a hearing does not relieve the parties of the necessity of proving the facts supporting their allegations or defenses. Affidavits, depositions, admissions, answers to interrogatories and stipulations may be employed to supplement the pleadings which constitute the record. The presiding officer may permit such submission to be supplemented by oral argument (transcribed if requested) and by proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law.

§ 956.7 Notice of hearing.

(a) When a request for a hearing is filed, a notice of hearing, stating the time and place thereof and advising the respondent of the consequences of a failure to appear at the hearing, will be issued (see § 956.10). In setting a hearing date, due regard shall be given to the respondent's need for:

(1) Adequate time to prepare a defense properly; and

(2) An expeditious resolution of allegations that may be damaging to his or her reputation. Subject to those considerations, whenever practicable, the hearing date shall be within 30 days of the date of the notice of hearing.

(b) The notice of proposed disciplinary action and the answer together with the reply, if any, shall become the pleadings in any proceeding in which a hearing is held.

§ 956.8 Reply.

Not more than 15 days from the service of the answer, the Ethical Conduct Officer may submit a reply.

§ 956.9 Service and filing of documents for the record.

(a) Each party shall file with the Recorder pleadings, motions, orders and other documents for the record. The Recorder shall cause copies to be served promptly on other parties to the proceeding and on the presiding officer.

(b) The parties shall submit four copies of all documents unless otherwise ordered by the presiding officer. One copy shall be signed as the original.

(c) Documents shall be dated and shall state the docket number and title of the proceeding. Any pleading or other document required by these rules or by order of the presiding officer to be filed by a specified date shall be filed with the Recorder on or before such date. The filing date shall be entered thereon by the Recorder.

(d) Service of all papers shall be effected by mailing the same, postage prepaid registered or certified mail, return receipt requested, or by causing said notice to be personally served on the proposed respondent by an authorized representative of the Postal Service. In the case of personal service, the person making service shall, if possible, secure from the proposed respondent or his agent, a written acknowledgment of receipt of said notice, showing the date and time of such receipt. If the person upon whom service is made will not acknowledge receipt, the person effecting service shall execute a statement, showing the time, place and manner of service, which shall constitute evidence of service. The acknowledgment, statement, or return receipt, when service is effected by mail, shall be made a part of the record by the Ethical Conduct Officer. The date of delivery, as shown by the acknowledgment or statement of personal service or the return receipt, shall be the date of service.

§ 956.10 Respondent's failure to appear at the hearing.

If the respondent shall fail to appear at the hearing, the presiding officer

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shall receive the Ethical Conduct Officer's evidence and render a decision without requirement of further notice to the respondent.

§ 956.11 Amendment of pleadings.

(a) By consent of the parties, a pleading may be amended at any time. Also, a party may move to amend a pleading at any time prior to the close of the hearing, provided that the proposed amendment is reasonably within the scope of the proceeding.

(b) When issues not raised by the pleadings but reasonably within the scope of the proceedings initiated by the notice of proposed disciplinary action are tried by express or implied consent of the parties, they shall be treated in all respects as if they had been raised in the pleadings. Such amendments, as may be necessary to make the pleadings conform to the evidence and to raise such issues, shall be allowed at any time upon the motion of any party.

(c) If a party objects to the introduction of evidence at the hearing on the ground that it is not within the issues framed by the pleadings, but fails to satisfy the presiding officer that an amendment of the pleadings would prejudice him on the merits, the presiding officer may allow the pleadings to be amended and may grant a continuance to enable the objecting party to rebut the evidence presented.

(d) The presiding officer may, upon reasonable notice and upon such terms as are just, permit service of a supplemental pleading setting forth transactions, occurrences, or events which have transpired since the date of the pleading sought to be supplemented and which are relevant to any of the issues involved.

§ 956.12 Continuances and extensions.

Continuances and extensions will not be granted by the presiding officer except for good cause shown.

§ 956.13 Hearings.

(a) Hearings are held at 2101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22201-3078, or other locations designated by the presiding officer.

(b) A party may, not later than 7 days prior to the scheduled date of a

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hearing, file a request that such hearing be held at a place other than that designated in the notice of hearing. He shall support his request with a statement outlining:

(1) The evidence to be offered in such place;

(2) The names and addresses of the witnesses who will testify;

(3) The reasons why such evidence cannot be produced at the place designated in the notice of hearing.

The presiding officer shall give consideration to the convenience and necessity of the parties and the relevance of the evidence to be offered.

[49 FR 40771, Oct. 17, 1984, as amended at 63 FR 66051, Dec. 1, 1998]

§ 956.14 Appearances.

(a) A respondent may appear and be heard in person or by attorney.

(b) An attorney may practice before the Postal Service in accordance with applicable rules issued by the Judicial Officer (see part 951 of this chapter).

(c) When a respondent is represented by an attorney, all pleadings and other papers subsequent to the notice of proposed disciplinary action shall be mailed to the attorney.

(d) All counsel shall promptly file notices of appearance. Changes of the respondent's counsel shall be recorded by notices from retiring and succeeding counsel and from the respondent.

(e) After an answer has been filed pursuant to the rules in this part, the Law Department shall represent the Ethical Conduct Officer in further proceedings relative to the hearing and shall in its notice of appearance identify the individual member of such department who has been assigned to handle the case on its behalf.

§ 956.15 Presiding officer.

(a) The presiding officer shall be an Administrative Law Judge qualified in accordance with law. The Chief Administrative Law Judge shall assign cases under this part upon rotation so far as practicable. The Judicial Officer may, for good cause found, preside at the reception of evidence upon request of either party.

(b) The presiding officer shall have authority to: